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ABSTRACT

A 1-year voluntary program in technology education has been offered for 4 years at the New Hampshire State Prison. To date, the inmates who have completed the program and been retested on the Test of Adult Basic Education have improved their initial scores as much as four grade levels. An associated drop in disciplinary problems in some inmates over the year in the program has been witnessed. One reason for the improvement may have been a change in self-esteem and in attitude toward education and achievement. Through the program, the inmate is provided with an introduction to technology systems and a survey of the tools, materials, and processes used by the systems. No assessment process is currently being routinely conducted on inmates after they finish any course of study in many institutions. A few studies since 1976 have dealt with the issues of vocational training and how positive terminations from a program can have an effect on recidivism rates. Studies have shown the value of vocational training in reducing recidivism by producing inmates with marketable skills who can find employment. Programs like technology education give inmates a clear understanding of the careers and opportunities open to them in the technical job market, and they can make informed decisions about their future. (YLB)

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TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION & THE FELON

(Teaching High School Behind Prison Walls)

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Inmates entering a state prison vary in background in social and educational level; from functionally illiterate to a college graduate or higher. Even so, prison is no respecter of persons regardless of economic background, educational achievement or social level. Therefore, upon entry to many prisons, inmates are evaluated in a receiving and diagnostic center or unit. They take many tests and are subjected to a myriad of classification procedures with which they are evaluated. At the New Hampshire State Prison the inmates are evaluated by the Test of Adult Basic Education or "TABE". It is published by CTB/McGraw-Hill (1987) and is a norm-referenced test designed to measure achievement in reading, mathematics, language, and spelling. This test is already given to every inmate upon entry to the prison during their classification process. By giving this and other tests it aids in making recommendations for placement in academic and vocational programming.

It is a fact that many inmates leave prison no better off than when they entered. Yet, inmates that make use of educational programming while in prison appear to have a higher success rate upon release. Inmates today have a variety of educational & vocational courses & programs available to them including college level degree programs in many institutions. Four years ago I developed the curriculum for a one year program in **Technology Education**. It has been added to the offering of vocational programs already in place at the New Hampshire State

Prison and this year received the prestigious ITEA Program Excellence Award for 1994. In June this year we completed its fourth successful year. The inmates, all voluntary, that complete the program retake the TABE. The retest is given to see if there has been any improvement in test scores after taking the course. The purpose was to examine the effectiveness of the material. Not all the subject areas tested are covered in the course, yet skills in the test areas are needed to function in the technology program of study. To date, those that have taken the retest have improved their initial scores as much as four(4) grade levels on the retest from when they first took the test upon entering prison. There also seems to have been an associated drop in disciplinary problems in some of the inmates over the year in the program.

One reason for the improvement may not have been all academic achievement, but a change in attitude, namely: [1] in their self esteem, and [2] their attitude toward education and achievement. The program and material are being presented to the inmates in a manner that suggest that they will eventually be released from prison and need to succeed in society. Their ability to function and a chance to improve their self-esteem are key elements of the course of instruction as well as the academic. These results, although preliminary, suggest a relationship between vocational education, attitude and success rates upon release.

Through the **Technology Education** program the inmate is provided with an introduction to technology systems as well as a survey of the tools, materials and processes used by the systems. Through instruction and Technology Learning Activities (**TLA'S**) the student becomes aware of how different systems interrelate, how they effect our daily lives, and how they make up our technological society.

Experiential activities are conducted that include varying levels of difficulty depending on the expertise of the student. Due to the nature of the correctional environment these activities are subject to security needs and restrictions inherent in prison life. Even so, activities are challenging and meaningful enough to stretch the inmate students educational horizons. They have opportunities to learn the interrelationships between the technology systems and the skills needed to function in them.

A **Technology Education** program takes place through a series of courses in four clusters: (1) **Communication Technology**; (2) **Materials Processes Technology(Construction & Manufacturing)**; (3) **Energy, Power and Transportation Technology**; and (4) **Technology Practicum**. This fourth cluster was designed for corrections and consists of Technology History, Interrelationships between systems, the difference between technology and science, and projects designed to allow the student to use skills learned in the other three cluster areas.

The inmate student is also exposed to **Industrial Psychology** in the form of **Vocational Rehabilitation** principles in this cluster. They will learn how to deal with real world problems of re-entering the work force and how to prepare for a career in a technological field.

There is currently no assessment process being routinely conducted on inmates after they finish any course of study in many institutions. There is not the time nor the money in most cases. They are not evaluated to see: [1] if there has been any change in academic level, [2] any change in attitude that could be attributed to a program or course of study, and [3] a correlation between achievement and recidivism. This type of information takes research study and the time and money to do it. Inmates therefore are assumed to have improved if they have satisfactorily finished the prescribed material. Yet, there seems to be a significant difference in the attitude and grade level achievement of inmates involved in vocational and educational programming vs. those inmates that only participate in required programming. Further, those inmates that succeed in voluntary academic programming appear to have a lower rate of recidivism than those inmates that do not enter programming.

The reports and journal articles that deal with "Recidivism and Vocational Education in Corrections" are in the minority. Yet, there have been a few studies since 1976 that have dealt with the issues of vocational training and how positive

terminations from the programming can have an effect on recidivism rates (Cogburn, 1988).

One common thread throughout articles was the lack of marketable skills and a typically poor showing in either education or employment found in the general inmate populations studied. The grade level on average completed by inmates is 9. The one study that dealt specifically with these issues concluded, "vocational education is seen as a cost-effective means of reducing the growth in the prison population. Individuals who are properly trained have the opportunity to become productive, tax-paying members of society" (Cogburn, 1988, p. 5).

In 1988, Cogburn found, after a 10 year study, that the recidivist rate was about 10.8% of positively terminated inmates at Ingram State Technical College (over 3000 inmates were included in this study). A similar study conducted on correctional education and the community college showed a recidivist rate for students at 25% vs. 77% for the general population in Oklahoma (Williams, 1989). "Vocational education emerged as a necessary component of public education at the turn of the century. Its potential for preventing crime by providing vocational skills to those who would otherwise be idle was one of its strongest supporting arguments. Vocational education became a component of correction education for the same reason" (Wolford, et al 1986, p. 33). That argument still stands today

and is supported by studies that show significant drops in rates of recidivism for properly trained inmates.

Other factors that must be considered in any program are, [1] the attitudes of the inmates themselves. The inmate population of any prison as a whole are suspect of the system that is keeping them behind walls while at the same time trying to habilitate them; [2] the cost of education vs. security costs. Both vie for the same limited funds available to run the system with security concerns being the priority. This coupled with overcrowding puts a strain on budgetary allocations, space and quality of equipment available for training (National Advisory Council on Vocational Education, 1981, & Day & McCane, 1982).

A study conducted at Rikers Island revealed that inmates were receiving on-the-job-training. They worked for industries and attained marketable vocational skills but lacked the documentation and certification to prove it once released (Garner, et al 1985). So, even with proper training, inmates found it difficult at best to gain employment in areas skilled without proper documentation. This tends to support the premise that competency based training must also be properly documented if it is to be valuable to the inmate student.

In summary, studies have shown the value of vocational training in reducing recidivism by producing inmates with

marketable skills that can find employment. Each study basically stated the same theme; there is clearly a suggested value in vocational education in lowering recidivism rates. Programs like **Technology Education** can play a vital role in this process. By giving inmates a clear understanding of the careers and opportunities open to them in the technical job market, they can make informed decisions about their future in educational and job training pursuits. For this to happen there is the need to provide adequate funding and proper documentation if any training is to provide inmates with the necessary foundation to become productive members of society.

(Note: A copy of the Technology Education Program Curriculum Guide is available by contacting the author at the New Hampshire State Prison in Concord, NH)

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